

FANTASTIC FOUR #60
Full Script for 22 pages
Second Draft/March 6, 2002

PAGE ONE

[MIKE: Our OPENING SCENE is very reminiscent of the early minutes in CITIZEN KANE where shadowy reporters are discussing the Kane newsreel in a darkened ampitheatre. Likewise, our opening shows a gathering of heavily shadowed figures in a dark room; this should look for all the world, until our reveal, like a sinister convocation of super-villains studying the FF so they can destroy them.]

PANEL ONE: OUR HEAVILY SILHOUETTED MAIN SPEAKER IS PRESENTING TO THE ROOM A SERIES OF FAKED-UP COMIC BOOK PANELS PROJECTED ONTO A SCREEN BEHIND HIM. MIKE, FEEL FREE TO HAVE SOME OF THE PROJECTIONS SLIGHTLY "BLEED" ONTO OUR NARRATOR IF YOU LIKE.

IMPORTANT LETTERING NOTE: THE COMIC PANELS WILL BE COMPLETE WITH BALLOONS AND CAPTIONS THAT I'VE LABELED "IN-PANEL,"--KNOCK THEM BACK TO FADED-OUT GRAYS AND KEEP THEM AT ABOUT 65-70% NORMAL SIZE SO THEY DON'T "COMPETE" WITH THE SHADOWY MAN'S BALLOONS.

AT ANY RATE, THE SHADOWY MAN IS INDICATING A PROJECTED PANEL SHOWING REED, SUE, JOHNNY AND BEN JUST BEFORE THE ORIGIN MOMENT, PROBABLY JUST HEAD-AND-SHOULDER SHOTS. THOUGH WE CAN SEE EVERYONE'S FACE CLEARLY, THEY'RE SUITING UP FOR THE ROCKET LAUNCH, REED'S MAYBE HANDING OUT HELMETS.

1 SPEAKER: ...recall their FIRST adventure together...when scientist REED RICHARDS took his fiancée SUSAN STORM and her brother JOHNNY on an exploratory STARSHIP piloted by aviator BEN GRIMM.

2 SPEAKER: You're AWARE, I presume, of what happened NEXT?

3 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: As the intrepid foursome prepares for FLIGHT...

4 (IN-PANEL) REED: She'll handle like a DREAM! I promise you the adventure of a LIFETIME!

((more))

PAGE ONE, continued

PANEL TWO: TWO SEATED SHADOWY FIGURES PIPE UP, THIS NEW ANGLE GIVING US OUR FIRST GLIMPSE THAT THE ROOM HAS A FEW GATHERED OBSERVERS SEATED AROUND A TABLE.

5 NEW GUY #1: DISASTER.

6 NEW GUY #2: Richards severely UNDERESTIMATED the amount of SHIELDING required to pass SAFELY through the VAN ALLEN BELT and BEYOND...

PANEL THREE: MAIN SPEAKER SHOWS US A PANEL OF THE FOUR INSIDE THE ROCKETSHIP, BEN DESPERATELY TRYING TO HOLD ONTO THE CONTROLS AS EVERYONE REELS FROM THAT FAMILIAR ONSLAUGHT OF COSMIC RAYS. MIKE, SEE IF YOU CAN ANGLE THIS PANEL SO AS TO HELP REINFORCE THAT THERE ARE OTHERS IN THE ROOM.

7 SPEAKER: ...leaving them VULNERABLE to IMMEASURABLE levels of RADIATION. Then...

8 (IN-PANEL) SFX: RAK TAC TAC TAC TAC TAC

9 (IN-PANEL) BEN: Hear THAT? It's COSMIC RAYS! I WARNED ya about 'em, egghead! I WARNED YA!

PANEL FOUR: MAIN SPEAKER SHOWS US A PANEL OF THE ROCKETSHIP LYING WRECKED IN A FIELD--OUR FOURSOME, TRANSFORMED AND AWKWARDLY USING THEIR POWERS, STAGGERING OUT OF THE ROCKET. FOR CLARITY'S SAKE, HAVE BEN LOOKING LESS LIKE THE EARLY "BLOBBY THING" AND SOMEWHAT MORE LIKE HE DOES TODAY.

10 SPEAKER: ...then, its mission ABORTED, the starship CRASH-LANDED in the New Jersey WOODS--its passengers miraculously UNHARMED--

11 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: Moments later...

12 (IN-PANEL) THOUGHT
BALLOON FROM ANYONE: We've CHANGED...ALL of us!

PAGE TWO

PANEL ONE: MAIN SPEAKER SHOWS US OUR LAST PANEL--A SHOT OF ALL FOUR, AS WE KNOW THEM TODAY, CHARGING TOWARDS US, USING THEIR POWERS (THING SHOVING SOMETHING OUT OF HIS WAY, CRUMPLING IT).

1 SPEAKER: --because their bodies had been MUTATED by the RADIATION--freakishly TRANSFORMED.

2 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: --and so was born--

3 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: MR. FANTASTIC!

4 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: THE HUMAN TORCH!

5 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: THE INVISIBLE WOMAN!

6 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: THE EVER-LOVIN', BLUE-EYED THING!

7 (IN-PANEL) CAPTION: THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

8 SPEAKER: Still, in a way I cannot even BEGIN to fathom, they turned TRAGEDY into TRIUMPH. From that day forward, Richards and his friends began NEW LIVES...and as a FAMILY and a TEAM, ushered in what we know TODAY as the AGE OF MARVELS.

9 SPEAKER: Lights?

PANEL TWO: NOW WE KNOW THE SOURCE OF THESE COMIC PANELS--THE SHADOWY LEADER'S HAND REMOVES AN OPEN, OLD AND WEATHERED COMIC BOOK FROM ATOP AN OVERHEAD PROJECTOR.

10 SPEAKER/off: The FANTASTIC FOUR are pioneers of SCIENCE...they are the world's first IMAGINAUTS, if you will...

PANEL THREE: THE ROOM'S NOW FULLY LIT. WE STILL DON'T SEE THE GUY WHO WAS TALKING (NO NEED TO YET)--WE'RE WATCHING HIS HAND DROP THE COMIC ATOP A TABLE FULL OF STUFF: FF LICENSED PRODUCTS (T-SHIRTS, MUGS, AND SO FORTH), MAGAZINE COVERS WITH FF MEMBERS ON 'EM, A DAILY BUGLE FRONT PAGE WHERE WE CAN READ A PARTIAL HEADLINE ABOUT THE FF. WE CAN SEE THE COMIC BOOK IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE CAN READ THE OLD FF LOGO AND THE BLURB "AMAZING ORIGIN ISSUE!" ON THE COVER.

11 SPEAKER/off: ...and now they are our CLIENTS.

12 SPEAKER/off: MEANING:

((more))

PAGE TWO, continued

PANEL FOUR: PULL BACK FOR AN INTERIOR ESTABLISHING OF THE NOW-LIT ROOM--OUR SPEAKER IS A MIDDLE-AGED EXECUTIVE ADDRESSING A HALF-DOZEN YOUNGER EXECS IN A MEETING ROOM. ALL THE MERCHANDISING STUFF IS IN FRONT OF HIM. ON ONE WALL, VERY PROMINENT, IS A BIG LOGO FOR "WEBBER & WEBBER PUBLIC RELATIONS."

13 SPEAKER: Their LICENSING REVENUE is down TWENTY-TWO PERCENT from last year, WIZARD MAGAZINE hasn't hot-picked their COMIC for MONTHS, VANITY FAIR PASSED on a Ben Grimm interview, and last week, Howard Stern bumped Johnny Storm for DANNY BONADUCE.

14 SPEAKER: Let me REPEAT that: DANNY BONADUCE.

15 SPEAKER: They need...SOMETHING. Shertzter, YOU'RE a brainstormer. What do you HAVE for me?

PANEL FIVE: ON SHERTZER, A YOUNG BUT HIP EXEC, A LITTLE WIDE-EYED AT BEING SUDDENLY SANDBAGGED LIKE THIS, MAYBE CAUGHT PLAYING WITH PAPER CLIPS IF YOU HAVE THE ROOM OR INCLINATION.

16 SHERTZER: I...I...

17 SHERTZER: Sir, I'm...ME, and they're...SUPER-HEROES. I handle ROCK STARS.

18 SPEAKER/off: Same THING. Pack a SUITCASE, Shertzter...

PANEL SIX, SMALL: TIGHT ON THE HEAD HONCHO, A MISCHEROUS GLINT IN HIS EYE.

19 SPEAKER: ...it's time to MEET THE FAMILY.

PAGE THREE

[NOTE: We are INSIDE a vehicle that's part Humvee, part spaceship--lots of instrumentation inside and no windows save for the "windshield," but still with front and back seats--in other words, an exploratory craft that still looks enough like a car that Reed's upcoming joke doesn't get lost. Throughout this entire first page, we are quick-cut close on everyone inside the car, starting tight on characters at first and then maybe gradually pulling back enough to see that Reed's driving, Sue's sitting with him up front, and Johnny, Ben and poor Shertzner are in the back.]

PANEL ONE, SMALL: TIGHT ON SHERTZER'S TERRIFIED EYES, NERVOUS SWEAT ROLLING DOWN HIS FACE.

1 OFF LEFT: Are we THERE yet?
2 OFF LEFT: Are we THERE yet?
3 OFF LEFT: ARE WE THERE YET?

PANEL TWO: PULL BACK TO SEE SHERTZER IN BETWEEN THE BICKERING BEN AND JOHNNY, WHO ARE SO IN EACH OTHER'S FACE THAT THEY IGNORE THE POOR GUY COWERING BETWEEN THEM. NOTE: BEN'S HOLDING A BIG GULP, JOHNNY'S HOLDING UP ONE HAND.

4 BEN: HA! I KNEW it!
5 BEN: Reed TOLDJA t'drain the LIZARD before we LEFT, Matchstick!

6 JOHNNY: And this is your business HOW? All those who even remember OWNING a reptile, raise your HANDS.

PANEL THREE: SUE IS NOW LEANING INTO THE SHOT TRYING TO MAKE PEACE, BUT SHE'S IGNORED. MEANWHILE, SHERTZER HUNKERS DOWN AS BEN ACCIDENTALLY SQUEEZES HIS CUP SO HARD THAT IT SPEWS SODA--MOSTLY ON JOHNNY.

7 SUE: Johnny! Ben! PLEASE!

8 BEN: Why, YOU...!

9 JOHNNY: HEY!

10 BEN/small: Oops.

((more))

PAGE THREE, continued

PANEL FOUR: NOW JOHNNY AND BEN ARE NOSE TO NOSE, SCREAMING AT ONE ANOTHER, AND THOUGH JOHNNY'S NOT FLAMING, HE'S GIVING OFF ENOUGH HEAT TO WAVER THE AIR AROUND HIM. WE CAN JUST BARELY SEE SHERTZER AT PANEL BOTTOM, TRYING TO SINK OUT OF SIGHT.

11 JOHNNY: You did that on PURPOSE! SuuUUue! Ben threw his COKE at me and the...the GUY!

12 SHERTZER/small: Shertzer.

13 BEN: It was an ACCIDENT, ya squirt! These mitts ain't exactly made f'r HIGH TEA, y'know!

PANEL FIVE: SHERTZER STARES WITH HORROR AS REED, WITHOUT OTHERWISE CHANGING THE ORIENTATION OF HIS BODY, BEGINS TO TWIST HIS HEAD ALL THE WAY AROUND.

14 BEN/OFF: 'sides, YOU'RE still sore ya got dumped by NAMORIT

15 JOHNNY/OFF/
CUTS OFF #14: I DON'T WANT TO HEAR THAT NAME!

16 REED: Will you two KNOCK IT OFF? We have a GUEST!

PANEL SIX: SHERTZER, ABSOLUTELY HORRIFIED, GAPES AT REED'S TWISTED NECK AS REED LOOKS PAST HIM.

17 OFF/two tails: He STARTED it!

18 SUE: I'm SO SORRY, Mr. Shertzer. When Johnny gets worked up, his SKIN TEMPERATURE rises to UNCOMFORTA--

19 SFX: sssss

20 BEN/off: WHAT name? NamorIEEEYOW! QUIT TOUCHIN' ME, BIC-HEAD!

21 JOHNNY/off: Touch. Touch, touch.

22 REED: I MEAN it, you two!

PAGE FOUR

PANEL ONE, BIG: AND NOW WE PULL WAY, WAY, WAY BACK TO SHOW THAT THEIR VEHICLE, RELATIVELY SMALL IN THE SHOT, IS STREAKING THROUGH AS WEIRD AN ALIEN DIMENSION AS YOU CAN IMAGINE.

1 FROM IN: Don't MAKE me turn this interdimensional transport AROUND!

PANEL TWO: BACK INSIDE, EVERYONE CONTINUES TO SQUABBLE--EXCEPT SUE, ALARMED, FRANTICALLY POINTING FORWARD, TRYING TO GET REED TO LOOK WHERE HE'S GOING.

2 REED: Am I UNDERSTOOD?

3 FROM OFF/two tails/icy: YES, dad.

4 SUE: Reed, eyes on the road! EYES ON THE ROAD!

PANEL THREE: THE SWERVING VEHICLE BARELY AVOIDS THE DATAVORE--A CYBERCREATURE (THAT WE WILL LEARN WAS BIOENGINEERED BY REED) THE SIZE OF A FIVE-STORY SKYSCRAPER. ITS MOST PROMINENT FEATURE BY FAR IS ITS GIANT, SUCKING MOUTH THAT'S CURRENTLY HALF-COVERED--AS IS THE ENTIRE DATAVORE--BY A HORDE OF INDIGENOUS, MULTI-ARMED ROACH-LIKE CREATURES.

5 FROM IN: Ah.

6 FROM IN: THERE you are.

PANEL FOUR: INSIDE THE VEHICLE, EVERYONE (BUT SHERTZER) BAILS OUT IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION, JOHNNY FLAMING ON. NOTE: REED CARRIES A LUNCHBOX-SIZED ELECTRONIC DOOHICKEY.

7 SUE: Mr. Shertzer, you might want to stay inside.

8 SHERTZER: "Might"?

9 SHERTZER/small: I WANTED a promotion I WANTED a promotion I WANTED a promotion

PAGE FIVE

PANEL ONE: BEN LANDS FEET-FIRST ON THE DATAVORE, HIS VERY IMPACT KNOCKING LOOSE SEVERAL OF THE PESTS.

1 BEN: What'dja CALL this thing again, Stretcho?

2 BEN: Git. Git. GIT.

PANEL TWO: REED SWEEPS MORE OF THE PESTS OFF WITH ELONGATED ARMS AS BEN WAILS AWAY ON THE THINGS.

3 REED: The DATAVORE, Ben! I concluded that the best way to gather information from the LEVIAVERSE was to bioengineer a self-sustaining DIMENSIONAL PROBE that could convert INGESTED MATTER into FUEL and

4 BEN/
CUTS OFF 5: DATAVORE. GOT it.

PANEL THREE: MEANWHILE, TORCH AND SUE LIKEWISE BLAST PETS AWAY, TORCH WITH FIREBOLTS, SUE WITH FORCE-SHIELDS. NOTE--JOHNNY'S NOT ACTUALLY FRYING ANY OF THE PESTS, JUST SCATTERING THEM.

5 TORCH: Your husband sure has some COOL HOBBIES, sis.

6 SUE: What can I SAY? Guess a big brain really DOES it for me.

PANEL FOUR: SUE, TURNING INVISIBLE, SMILING BROADLY, SIDESTEPS A LUNGING PEST.

7 TORCH/off: I was being SARCASTIC and, oh yeah, EEEEWWW.

8 TORCH/off: Digging the INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD brooms, though. Need a HAND?

9 SUE: I'm fine, sweetie. Just thinking about how sexy BIG BRAINS are...mmMMMmm...

10 TORCH/off: Oh, God, PLEASE stop.

11 SUE/small: Heh.

PAGE SIX

PANEL ONE: REED LEAPS INTO THE DATAVORE'S ENORMOUS MOUTH,
CLOGGED WITH PESTS--

1 REED: By SWARMING the DATAVORE, these INDIGENOUS
LIFEFORMS are KILLING it--ruining MONTHS of
RESEARCH!

PANEL TWO: --AND, BY RAPIDLY EXPANDING, FLEX-SHOVES THE PESTS
OUT EVERY WHICH WAY, CLEARING THE BEAST'S MAW.

2 REED: They're MINDLESS INSECTS merely reacting to
the Datavore's PRESENCE! Clear them AWAY--but
try not to HURT them!

PANEL THREE: MINDLESS? HA. ONE'S ON JOHNNY, BURNING BUT
UNDAUNTED BY HIS FLAME, OPENING MULTIPLE TOOTHY MAWS AND IN-OUR-
FACE CREEPY AND VERY DANGEROUS-LOOKING. JOHNNY'S PANICKING.

3 TORCH: Hey, by "MINDLESS," did you mean instead
maybe FIREPROOF...?

[Lettering note: the "pest's" balloon contains words of a
uniform size but jumbled up and at varying angles to one
another.]

4 PEST/creepy: heat blood life warm hunger hurt taste fire

PANEL FOUR: BAM! BEN KNOCKS IT AWAY WITH ONE PUNCH.

5 BEN: I SAID GIT!

6 BEN: You OKAY, kid?

7 TORCH: Yeah. Just...

8 TORCH: Yeah.

PANEL FIVE, SMALL: REED AFFIXES HIS ELECTRONIC DOOHICKEY TO THE
SIDE OF THE DATAVORE.

9 REED: There. This should repel any further
ATTACKS. We're DONE here.

PAGE SEVEN

PANEL ONE: BEN TOSSES SUE UP TOWARDS THEIR HOVERING VEHICLE.

1 BEN: Mission ACCOMPLISHED! Gimme a LIFT, Suzie?

2 SUE: Maneuver 17-A?

3 BEN: Oh, my AUNT PETUNIA, stop showin' off 'cause we COMPANY! I c'n barely remember our PHONE NUMBER, okay? Just let down a friggin' LINE!

PANEL TWO: REED (STRETCHING, NATCH) AND TORCH ZOOM UP TO THE VEHICLE. SUE'S ALREADY ABOARD, BEN CLAMBERING UP THE INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD ROPE SHE'S EXTENDING.

4 SUE: All ABOARD! Who's up for ICE CREAM?

5 TORCH: Do we still have any of that BUTTER PECAN Reed came up with? The stuff that burns more calories than RUGBY?

PANEL THREE: INSIDE, THE TEAM GETS SITUATED. WE DON'T HAVE TO SEE THEM ALL--JUST SUE AND SHERTZER, WHO'S KINDA SHELLSHOCKED-- BUT, MAN, IT SURE WOULD BE NICE HERE TO SHOW REED AND SUE HOLDING HANDS AND SMILING AT ONE ANOTHER IF YOU HAVE THE ROOM. BECAUSE, GOD KNOWS, THERE'S JUST NOTHIN' BUT ROOM IN THIS SCRIPT, HE SAID SARCASTICALLY.

6 SUE: Are you KIDDING? What do you think got me through that last PREGNANCY?

7 BEN/small: Nuts.

8 SHERTZER: Ice...cream. So you...do stuff like this...OFTEN?

PANEL FOUR, ALONG PAGE BOTTOM, ITS OWN PANEL: THE VEHICLE ROCKETS AWAY PAST TITLE AND CREDITS.

9 FROM IN: Do what?

10 FROM IN: Take a SUNDAY DRIVE?

11 TITLE: INSIDE OUT

PAGE EIGHT

PANEL ONE, SMALL: ON FRANKLIN, SITTING IN A CORNER OF THE BAXTER BUILDING "GARAGE," READING AN FF COMIC AND PEEKING OVER THE TOP TOWARDS US. THE PAGES ARE FLUTTERING AND HIS HAIR'S WHIPPING AROUND TO CONNOTE A BUILDING BREEZE. NOTE: HE'S WEARING A "4½" T-SHIRT, THOUGH WE DON'T HAVE TO SEE IT HERE.

PANEL TWO, BIG: PULL BACK SO WE CAN LOOK OVER/PAST FRANKLIN TO SEE THE FF'S DIMENSIONAL HUMVEE ENTER THE SPACIOUS GARAGE THROUGH AN IRREGULAR DIMENSIONAL RIFT. NOTE: THE "HUMVEE" IS SMOKING, SLIMY, AND FROSTED OVER IN PLACES, THE WORSE FOR WEAR-- AND WE CAN'T SEE THE UNDERCARRIAGE FROM THIS ANGLE.

1 SFX: sssskOW!

2 FRANKLIN: Cool.

PANEL THREE: SECONDS LATER. MOM HUGS FRANKLIN, AND THEY'RE BOTH LIT UP. SHERTZER EYES THE BOY WITH GREAT DISCOMFORT.

3 FRANKLIN: MOM!

4 SUE: HEY, you! Franklin, say hello to Mr. Shertzer!

5 SHERTZER: Umm...hi. What...what does HE...do, Mrs. Richards...?

PANEL FOUR: REED DROPS A GLOWING GIANT-SIZED ATOM INTO FRANKLIN'S OUTSTRETCHED PALMS. SUE AND SHERTZER WATCH FROM BACKGROUND.

6 SUE: Only what you'd EXPECT a wonderfully BRAVE, wonderfully SMART, wonderfully NORMAL seven-year-old boy TO do. He and his sister are AMAZING.

7 FRANKLIN: DaddydaddywhajaBRINGmedaddy?

8 REED: How about a brand new MACROATOM?

9 FRANKLIN: Cooooooooool.

PAGE NINE

PANEL ONE: INTERIOR, A SPACIOUS LIVING ROOM, EVERYONE ENTERING THROUGH A SIDE DOOR, SUE AND SHERTZER IN THE LEAD.

1 SHERTZER: Right. You also have a baby DAUGHTER named...VAL...?

2 SUE: And she's just ADORABLE. You'll see. Right now, she's in DAY CARE. With her sitter. On the moon.

3 SHERTZER: Oh, why NOT?

4 SUE: So Reed...HIRED your firm? To "improve our image"? Forgive me, but why on EARTH would something like that...

PANEL TWO: REED ESCORTS SHERTZER OFF THROUGH ANOTHER DOORWAY, LEAVING THE OTHERS BEHIND.

5 REED: ...MATTER? Because popularity is MERCURIAL, Sue. People like US who don't periodically REINVENT ourselves are too quickly FORGOTTEN.

6 REED: Mr. Shertzer's been sent to OBSERVE us for a few days and see what might be done to keep us living the GLAMOROUS LIFE.

7 REED/
dwindles: While Fantastic Four, Inc. is a NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, Mr. Shertzer, LICENSING still makes a substantial dent in our R&D outlay...

((more))

PAGE NINE, continued

PANEL THREE: SUE, BEN AND JOHNNY ARE QUITE CLEARLY PUZZLED.

8 BEN: I figgered PATENT ROYALTIES took care of that. Since when does Reed give a big, stretchy hock about our Q-RATIN'?

9 SUE: I know. It doesn't seem at ALL like Reed to be that concerned with our...I don't know... CELEBRITY. Johnny, any THOUGHTS?

10 JOHNNY: Yes. I have no ice cream.

11 SUE: =sigh= Johnny STORM...

PANEL FOUR: MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE GARAGE, ONE OF THE PEST-CREATURES PEEKS OUT FROM UNDER THE DIMENSIONAL HUMVEE--

12 CAPTION: "...SO much more goes on around you than you pay ANY attention to..."

PANEL FIVE: --AND SKITTERS AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS. HOPE YOU LIKED DRAWING HIM, BECAUSE WE'LL SURE SEE HIM AGAIN SOMEDAY.

PAGE TEN

SEPARATE NARROW PANEL ACROSS TOP: MONDAY

PANEL ONE: TIGHT ON THE SIDE OF THE BAXTER BUILDING--MORE SPECIFICALLY, A THREE-FOOT-SQUARE ACCESS PANEL LABELED "BAXTER BUILDING ACCESS PANEL 32J".

1 FROM OFF: Last one. I THINK this is it. Gimme a peek.

PANEL TWO: SAME EXACT, EXCEPT SUE'S MAKE-STUFF-INVISIBLE POWER IS COMING FROM OFF, ALLOWING US TO SEE SOME BROKEN MACHINERY AND SEVERED WIRING BEHIND THE PANEL.

2 FROM OFF: Yep.

PANEL THREE: PULL BACK TO SEE SUE, JOHNNY AND SHERTZER STANDING ON AN INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD PLATFORM ALONGSIDE THE BAXTER BUILDING A FEW STORIES DOWN FROM THE TOP. JOHNNY--NOT AS TORCH --IS REACHING INSIDE THE NOW-OPEN ACCESS PANEL WITH ONE HAND, HOLDING THE OTHER (FLAMING) HAND UP, READY TO PUT IT TO USE. JOHNNY'S WEARING SOME SORT OF GOOFY-LOOKING MICRO-GOGGLES. SUE'S TALKING TO HIM, BUT SHERTZER'S JUST LOOKING STRAIGHT DOWN WITH TERROR. EVERYBODY WOULD BE A LITTLE WINDBLOWN THAT HIGH UP, I'D THINK.

3 JOHNNY: Stupid MAD THINKER. He's all, "Your vaunted security system means NOTHING to ME!" and I'M all, "You JERK! Who do you think's gonna hafta clean up YOUR mess breakin' in?" and he's all, "What FOOLS would put their HEADQUARTERS in MIDTOWN MANHATTAN where ANYONE can GET to it?"

4 SUE: He didn't say that.

5 JOHNNY: Okay, that part was ME. But, geez, the AVENGERS at least have a YARD...

PANEL FOUR: SHERTZER'S POV--LOOKING DOWN PAST HIS OWN FEET TO THE STREET THIRTY STORIES BELOW, THROUGH A FORCE-FIELD HE CAN'T EVEN SEE.

6 SUE/off: Stop changing the SUBJECT. Honey, Namorita didn't just LEAVE. Something HAPPENED. What WAS it?

7 JOHNNY/off: Eh.

((more))

PAGE TEN, continued

PANEL FIVE: SHERTZER, STILL LOOKING DOWN, HUGS SUE TIGHT FROM BEHIND. SUE SIDELONG-GLANCES AT SHERTZER ODDLY AS IF TO SAY, "WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?"

8 SUE: Johnny, don't BE this way. I'd LIKE to HELP--

9 SUE: =HNFF=

10 SUE: Something the MATTER, Mr. Shertzter?

11 SHERTZER/small: I dropped a quarter.

12 SHERTZER/small: I think I killed a man.

PAGE ELEVEN

PANEL ONE: JOHNNY, STARING THROUGH HIS GOGGLES, USES HIS FLAMING FINGERTIP LIKE A WELDING TORCH, EMITTING A FINELY NARROW FLAME TO MEND THE BROKEN MESS BEHIND THE ACCESS PANEL.

1 JOHNNY: I'm fine. I don't wanna TALK about it.
Let's just say it was BIG and...UNUSUAL.

2 JOHNNY: In fact, I think we invented a whole new
REASON for people to BREAK UP.

3 SUE/off: Which WAS...?

4 SUE/off: Johnny?

5 JOHNNY: =Gasp!= Feel...subject...CHANGING...!

PANEL TWO: SUE STARES AT SHERTZER, STILL LOOKING DOWN, STILL TERRIFIED.

6 SUE: Okay. Normally only REED gets this close to
me, Mr. Shertzter.

7 SHERTZER: I'm standing on...NOTHING. I'm standing on
NOTHING.

8 SUE: It's an invisible force-field. You're just
not ACCUSTOMED to invisibility. Here. Try this.

PANEL THREE: SHERTZER NOW STANDS AWAY FROM SUE AS SHE TURNS
PATCHES OF HIM INVISIBLE. HE LOOKS DOWN AT HIMSELF AND FREAKS.

9 SHERTZER: AAAAAH!

10 SUE: Kind of FUN, isn't it?

11 SHERTZER: AAAAAH!

((more))

PAGE ELEVEN, continued

PANEL FOUR: SHERTZER SEES HE'S BACK TO NORMAL, BUT WE NEED TO ANGLE THIS SHOT SO HE CAN'T SEE SUE SMILING AND WINKING AT JOHNNY AND JOHNNY, FIST TO MOUTH, SUPRESSING A LAUGH.

12 JOHNNY: =hmmkkkhh=

13 JOHNNY/small: Oh, THAT was VERY mature.

14 SUE/small: It's going to be a long week.

15 SUE: But, seriously, there's something we need to discuss about your FUTURE, Johnny. I have an OFFER to make.

PANEL FIVE: SUE (EXASPERATED) WATCHES JOHNNY (IN FULL TORCH FORM) FLY AWAY. SHERTZER WATCHES, TOO, *IF YOU CAN FIT HIM IN.*

16 TORCH: Not now! Gotta FLY!

17 SUE: Johnny, WAIT! It's--

18 SUE: =sigh=

19 SUE/small: --it's IMPORTANT.

20 SUE: Aaargh.

PAGE TWELVE

SEPARATE NARROW PANEL ACROSS TOP: TUESDAY

PANEL ONE: HEY, MIKE, DO YOU KNOW WHAT A BLACKBERRY E-MAIL SENDER IS? WWW.BLACKBERRY.NET -- YOU HOLD IT BETWEEN YOUR PALMS AND TAP THE KEYS WITH YOUR THUMBS. ANYWAY, WE'RE LOOKING DOWN OVER SHERTZER'S SHOULDER AS HE TAPS A MESSAGE INTO SOMETHING AS CLOSE TO A BLACKBERRY AS WE CAN LEGALLY GET AWAY WITH.

1 E-MAIL CAP: TO: RJ@WEBBER.COM
RE: Tell my wife I love her.

Mr. Webber:

In the moment before my certain death, I always hoped I'd hear ANGELS singing. Soothing MUSIC. NO. Here's a little something not many people know about Reed Richards when he STRETCHES:

PANEL TWO: PULL BACK FOR THE ESTABLISHING PANEL--WE'RE INSIDE A HIGH-TECH LAB THAT'S NOT REED'S. THERE'S A COUPLE OF INCHES OF WHAT LOOKS LIKE WATER SLOSHING AROUND ON THE FLOOR, AND AS A CONSEQUENCE, SEVERAL SCIENTISTS, THE FF, AND ANYTHING THAT'S NOT NAILED DOWN ARE CAROMING THROUGH THE AIR EVERY WHICH WAY. SHERTZER STANDS ON THE CEILING. REED'S THE MOST PROMINENT FIGURE HERE--HE'S ANCHORED HIMSELF TO WALLS/CEILING AND IS STRETCHED THIN TO CATCH SCIENTISTS FROM BASHING AGAINST THE WALL. ALSO NOTE: BEN'S WEARING PAJAMAS WITH LITTLE DUCKIES ALL OVER 'EM.

2 E-MAIL CAP: That noise made when you drag your hand over a BALLOON...?

3 BEN: Ya know what'd be really good about now?

4 BEN: A big, steamin' cup o' GRAVITY!

5 REED: I SUSPECT something very SIMILAR is what STARTED this, Ben! That LIQUID all over the FLOOR negates the GRAVITATIONAL PULL of the--

5a REED: Ben, LOOK OUT!

((more))

PAGE TWELVE, continued

PANEL THREE: BEN, WITH ONE SWING, SMASHES SOMETHING BIG THAT WAS STREAKING RIGHT TOWARDS HIM.

6 E-MAIL CAP: A LOT of THAT. Only SLIGHTLY less unnerving...

7 BEN: Drag a guy outta bed at THREE A.M....

8 BEN: How'm I EVER gonna give Tom Cruise a run for his money without my BEAUTY REST?

9 E-MAIL CAP: ...than the CONSTANT sound of a bag of ROCKS in a CLOTHES DRYER.

PAGE THIRTEEN

PANEL ONE: REED BEGINS TO STRETCH UPWARD AS TORCH STARTS TO EVAPORATE THE LIQUID.

1 E-MAIL CAP: Yes, you look at these guys from a DISTANCE, as MOST of us do, they're the KENNEDY FAMILY. You get up CLOSE...

2 REED: Johnny, accelerate the SUBLIMATION--FAST!

3 TORCH: ENGLISH!

4 REED: BOIL THE LIQUID! Ben, Sue--ANCHOR me!

PANEL TWO: REED SHOOTS OUT A SKYLIGHT AFTER A PANICKED SCIENTIST WHO'S FALLING UP INTO THE NIGHT SKY. IF IT MATTERS: WE'RE ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS SOMEWHERE.

5 REED: If I don't catch Dr. Miro before he reaches ESCAPE VELOCITY--

PANEL THREE: REED GRABS THE GUY AND STRUGGLES TO HOLD ON--WE CAN SEE THE PAIN IN REED'S FACE AS HE STRAINS.

6 E-MAIL CAP: ...they're a little more ADDAMS than CLEAVER.

7 REED: --he'll hit the IONOSPHERE at MACH THREE!

PANEL FOUR: BACK INSIDE, BEN'S HOLDING REED'S LEGS, AND SUE'S LIKEWISE HELPING ANCHOR HER HUSBAND WITH AN INVISIBLE FORCE-FIELD. THE LAST OF THE EVAPORATED LIQUID BUBBLES AWAY AT THEIR FEET.

8 E-MAIL CAP: YOU try having a prolonged CONVERSATION with a guy who's on FIRE when your every instinct is to tackle him with your COAT. If I live through this WEEK...

9 SUE: Reed, pull BACK! You're stretching TOO FAR!

10 BEN: RELAX, Suzie! I got my FOOTIN' now that junior steamed away the GOO! I'm reelin' him IN!

11 E-MAIL CAP: ...I want a DOUBLE promotion.

PAGE FOURTEEN

PANEL ONE: LATER. SUE AND BEN WATCH REED, IN THE DISTANCE, STERNLY LECTURING THE ASSEMBLED SCIENTISTS.

1 E-MAIL CAP: [cont'd]
Good news. I LIVED. You can stop worrying about who to give my OFFICE to.

2 E-MAIL CAP: Richards THANKED the scientists for calling him in, then immediately launched into what, digging through the ten-dollar words, sounded like a lecture on the dangers of playing with "liquid null-gravitons." And then I LEARNED something...

3 SUE: He wasn't INVITED.

4 BEN: Huh?

PANEL TWO: SUE (TROUBLED), BEN, JOHNNY...AND SHERTZER SOMEWHERE EITHER HERE OR SOON JUST SO READERS DON'T LOSE TRACK OF HIM.

5 SUE: This THINK-TANK of GENIUSES. "CAUSE CEREBRAL." It's an ANNUAL EVENT. Reed says next to the NOBELS, an INVITATION is the greatest honor in SCIENCE.

6 SUE: Reed's been attending since he was SEVENTEEN, but...

7 BEN: But ya mean those bums included him OUT this year? Heck, he's probably smarter'n all of 'em put TOGETHER! Why would they...?

PANEL THREE: EVERYONE TURNS AND STARES SILENTLY AND SUSPICIOUSLY AT SHERTZER, WHICH TAKES HIM ABACK.

((more))

PAGE FOURTEEN, continued

PANEL FOUR: SHERTZER DEFENDS HIMSELF AS SUE LECTURES HIM.

8 SHERTZER: Is that why he hired my firm? I dunno! I swear!

9 SHERTZER: I mean, I can't judge the size of his EGO--

10 SUE: No, you CAN'T. You listen to ME. Reed is VERY humble--but if his ego were a THOUSAND TIMES bigger than you're INSINUATING, he'd STILL be ENTITLED to it.

PANEL FIVE: LIKEWISE, JOHNNY CHIMES IN. HE'S MAD, AND BOY, HE'S GIVING OFF HEAT ENOUGH TO MAKE THE AIR AROUND HIM WAVY.

11 JOHNNY: What SHE said. I'm not the sharpest tack, but I'm smart enough to know that a mind like REED's comes along MAYBE once every HUNDRED YEARS.

12 JOHNNY: I don't see any of those highbrows who called us IN decoding ALIEN LANGUAGES or rewriting HAWKING. I don't hear about THEM discovering HALF the stuff REED does. Is my brother-in-law WEIRD? HECK, yeah.

13 JOHNNY: But that's the kinda weird that CHANGES THE WORLD for the BETTER, and WE get the BEST SEATS in the HOUSE.

PAGE FIFTEEN

PANEL ONE: LATER. AN ALIEN LANDSCAPE. THE FF PUMMEL SKRULLS TO DEFEND AN ALIEN PLANT.

1 E-MAIL CAP: Not a bad SPEECH from the KID BROTHER. Told me something NEW...but not about RICHARDS.

2 E-MAIL CAP: Clearly, the other three are ALL adventurers at heart, but most of the time, Johnny fiddles with CARS, Sue wrestles with MOTHERHOOD, and Ben watches a LOT of WWF. They don't tend to navigate the Amazon or explore rat-infested catacombs "just 'cause."

PANEL TWO: LATER STILL. A BARREN AFRICAN PLAIN. REED, DUSTING OFF HIS DIRTY, I-JUST-PLANTED-THIS HANDS, WATCHES ALONGSIDE EMACIATED TRIBESMAN AS A ROLLING WAVE OF FRESH GRASS RADIATES OUT FROM THAT SAME TRANSPLATED ALIEN FAUNA.

3 E-MAIL CAP: On the other hand, if Reed wants to investigate some civilization he found living on the side of an ELECTRON, they'll jump in and run interference without HESITATION.

4 E-MAIL CAP: It's that kind of HELP that allows Richards to focus on scientific breakthroughs that...well, not to overstate, but that could possibly pioneer the FUTURE of the HUMAN RACE. My God...does his family REALIZE how much they CONTRIBUTE to that?

PANEL THREE: BACK INSIDE THE BAXTER BUILDING. SHERTZER'S SEATED, TAPPING AWAY ON HIS E-MAILER, COMPLETELY OBLIVIOUS TO THE FACT THAT BEN'S LEANING OVER HIS SHOULDER, READING WHAT HE'S WRITING.

5 E-MAIL CAP: Is that why they do what they do?

((more))

PAGE FIFTEEN, continued

PANEL FOUR: SHERTZER, ANNOYED AT THE INTRUSION, LOOKS UP AT BEN. BEN'S STILL READING.

6 BEN: Why'dja THINK?

7 SHERTZER: I...I...

8 SHERTZER: ...I...

9 SHERTZER: Because you're super-heroes...?

PANEL FIVE: BEN SMILES AS HE PROCESSES THIS STATEMENT.

10 BEN: ...

11 BEN: Heh.

PANEL SIX: SHERTZER, COMPLETELY BAFFLED, WATCHES BEN WALK OFF INTO THE BACKGROUND CHUCKLING TO HIMSELF.

12 BEN/smaller: Heh heh heh.

13 BEN/smaller still: Funny.

PAGE SIXTEENSEPARATE NARROW PANEL ACROSS TOP: WEDNESDAY

PANEL ONE: ESTABLISHING SHOT, DOWNTOWN SOHO. BEN (IN TRENCHCOAT) AND SHERTZER ARE WALKING DOWN THE STREET. BEN'S LUGGING A GRANDFATHER CLOCK ON HIS BACK. AROUND THEM, BYSTANDERS POINT, AND THERE ARE A FEW SIGNS OF FF LICENSING--A T-SHIRT, MAYBE A "4" CAP, THAT SORT OF THING--DON'T GO OVERBOARD, BUT I'D THINK WE'D NEED AT LEAST THREE TO MAKE THE POINT.

1 BEN: ...NEVER takes me shoppin' just ta be NICE,
 noooo...

2 BEN: SUZIE? Suzie, wait UP! This ain't no way
 ta treat your PACK MULE...

3 SHERTZER: So, Mr. Grimm, I have to ask...what's it like to
 see yourself MERCHANDISED? I can't go HALF A
 BLOCK in Soho without finding saleables both
 licensed...

PANEL TWO: THEY ROUND THE CORNER TO SEE SUE BOPPING A LITTLE TO SOME STREET MUSIC. EVEN THOUGH SHE'S HOLDING BABY VAL, SUE ACTUALLY LOOKS CUTE AND SEXY, SHE'S DIGGING IT. BEN (SOUR) SEES SUE, BUT SHERTZER'S LOOKING OFF-PANEL TOWARDS THE ACTUAL SOURCE OF THE MUSIC.

4 SHERTZER: ...huh!...

5 SHERTZER: ..and UNlicensed. RAP music. Interesting...

6 BEN: Aw, f'r the luvva MIKE! RAP ain't music!
 It's just a buncha talentless BOZOS who ain't
 ever learned t'play a real INSTRU--

((more))

PAGE SIXTEEN, continued

PANEL THREE: NOW BEN SEES THE MUSICIANS--THREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN BOYS IN THEIR LATE TEENS--TWO ARE OBLIVIOUS 'CAUSE THEY'RE BUSY SINGING, BUT THE THIRD IS ABSOLUTELY GOGGLE-EYED TO SEE BEN. TWO ARE WEARING (DIFFERENT) SWEATSHIRTS WITH BEN'S PICTURE, ONE'S WEARING A SKI CAP WITH BEN'S FACE ON IT. NEARBY, A SMALL TABLE WITH A BLARING BOOM-BOX AND FEW CDs FOR SALE.

7 BEN: Huh?

8 KIDS A & B: you don't know my street, you couldn't take my blows,
 see you cryin' while you dying, tryna find some heroes

9 KID C: Oh, DIP-- 's HIM! Papa GRIMM LIVE on da SET!

PANEL FOUR: SUE, ALMOST BESIDE HERSELF WITH AMUSEMENT, WATCHES BEN SHAKE HANDS WITH THE LEAD KID. (HELL, HE CAN HOLD A GRANDFATHER CLOCK WITH ONE HAND.)

10 SUE: Seems you have some FANS, Mr. "Everybody
 thinks I'm a MONSTER."

11 KID C: True DAT! Gimme some BRICK, O.G.! Jamal,
 TUNE the man!

PANEL FIVE: CLOSE ON ONE OF THE CD JEWEL BOXES AS IT'S PRESSED INTO BEN'S HAND--IT'S A GARAGE-LABEL JOB SPORTING A DRAWING OF BEN. IT'S TITLE, OF COURSE: CLOBBERIN' TIME.

12 BEN/off: What the--?

13 KID C/off: You da CHIM, Mr. Grimm! Bust THIS--

PAGE SEVENTEEN

PANEL ONE: TO EVERYONE'S SURPRISE AND DELIGHT, THE KIDS BUST OUT WITH THIS TUNE, WHICH A 40-YEAR-OLD WHITE GUY COULD NEVER WRITE, SO LET'S ALL GIVE THANKS TO MIXMASTER DEVIN GRAYSON:

1 KIDS: Think you know what I oughta do?
Well, hater, hate ta say it, I got news for you
you don't know my street, you couldn't take my
blows,
see you cryin' while you dying, tryinna find some
heroes.
Not me--I don't let nobody mess with mine
just step off, hater, or it's clobberin' time.

2 KIDS: Got a sting like the Thing
(yeah, it's clobberin' time)
best believe--I don't let nobody mess with mine
just step off, hater, or it's clobberin' time.

PANEL TWO: BEN STARES AT THE CD IN HIS HAND, CLEARLY HAS NO IDEA WHAT TO SAY, BUT KID C IS EAGER FOR A GOOD WORD. THE OTHER TWO KIDS CONTINUE SINGING IN BACKGROUND.

3 KIDS A & B: Don't nobody tell me how to spend my days
I've come too far to let you change my ways
Me and my G's always up for more
we rolling like we goin' all Fantastic Four

4 KID C: SO? Whatcha THINK?

5 THING: I think th' HULK'S gonna be awful JEALOUS.
I dunno what you nutty kids're DOIN'...but keep
DOIN' it, I guess!

6 THING: ...

7 THING: Thanks, kid.

((more))

PAGE SEVENTEEN, continued

PANEL THREE: SHERTZER, BEN, SUE W/VAL ALL WALK DOWN THE STREET.

8 SHERTZER: I'm surprised YOU'RE surprised, Mr. Grimm.
Groups from LINKIN PARK to CYPRESS HILL drop your
name all the TIME. They LOVE you. Did you like
the SONG?

9 BEN: Beats the heck outta that golden oldie
"AIEEE! GET AWAY FROM MY BABY!"

10 BEN: Aaahh, it still ain't nothin' but YAKKIN' to
a BEAT. Who c'n LISTEN ta that junk?

SEPARATE NARROW PANEL ACROSS PAGE: THURSDAY

PANEL FOUR: BEN DOING ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING YOU FEEL LIKE DRAWING
HIM DOING SO LONG AS HE CAN BE ABSENTLY MUTTERING THIS UNDER HIS
BREATH:

11 BEN/small: ...not me--I don't let nobody mess with mine,
just step off, hater, or it's clobberin' time...

PAGE EIGHTEENSEPARATE NARROW PANEL ACROSS TOP: FRIDAY

PANEL ONE: INTERIOR, THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY. CLOSE ON FRANKLIN, WHO'S WEARING A HUMAN TORCH CLUB SHIRT. HE'S HOLDING A TOY CONTAINER OF BUBBLE GOO AND BLOWING TRIANGULAR AND SQUARE BUBBLES FROM A NORMAL BUBBLE WAND. IT MUST BE COOL TO HAVE REED AS A DAD.

1 SUE/off: You know what's to our credit as far as this whole husband/wife thing goes? We've developed a good system.

PANEL TWO: PULL BACK FOR AN ESTABLISHING SHOT, THOUGH WE DON'T NEED A WHOLE LOT OF BACKGROUND UNTIL NEXT PANEL. SUE AND REED, IN STREET CLOTHES, ARE WALKING ALONG HAND-IN-HAND, STILL IN LOVE AFTER ALL THESE YEARS. FRANKLIN'S RIDING REED'S SHOULDERS.

2 REED: For example...?

3 SUE: Example: when you march to your own oblivious beat, I know when to trust you to wander OFF and when to grab you by the COLLAR.

4 REED: This is about SHERTZER, isn't it?

PANEL THREE, BIG: REED AND SUE (STILL HOLDING HANDS) WALK BY A MUSEUM DISPLAY--THE HALF-MELTED REMAINS OF A GIANT MANDIBLED ROBOT MONSTER. LEAVE ROOM FOR THE SIGNAGE. IF YOU CAN WORK IT IN, AND THIS IS PROBABLY TOO MUCH, IT WOULD BE GOOD TO SEE SOME KIDS POINTING AT THE RICHARDS FAMILY IN RECOGNITION AND EXCITEMENT TO BETTER TRANSITION US TO NEXT PANEL.

5 SUE: How'd you know?

6 REED: We've developed a good SYSTEM.

7 REED: You're DYING to ask me why on EARTH I commissioned his SERVICES.

8 SIGN: MANDLEBOT
Rampaged through Egypt and U.S.S.R.
Defeated by the FANTASTIC FOUR

((more))

PAGE EIGHTEEN, continued

PANEL FOUR: REED AND SUE SIGN AUTOGRAPHS FOR A FEW KIDS CROWDING AROUND.

9 REED: Well...

[Kid balloons can be tailless]

10 1st KID: Hey! Hey, that's THEM!

11 2nd KID: No WAY!

12 3rd KID: YES way! Gimme a PEN!

13 4th KID: Can ya make it out to CODY? With a "Y"?

14 5th KID: THANK you, Mr. ELASTIC!

PANEL FIVE: REED AND SUE SHOOT ONE ANOTHER A LOOK THAT SAYS, "HEY, WE STILL ADORE ONE ANOTHER."

15 REED: ...I believe the name "Mr. ELASTIC"--whoever HE is--tells the tale. Call me VAIN, but I LIKE people knowing who we ARE.

16 REED: Can you imagine Johnny the first time someone says to him, "Didn't you used to be the Human Torch?"

17 SUE: Not without mentally counting the CASUALTIES. And I would never call you VAIN, sweetheart...

PANEL SIX, small: SUE WHISPERS TO HERSELF, GLANCING BACK OVER HER SHOULDER TOWARDS REED (HIS BACK TURNED, OUT OF EARSHOT) AS THEY CONTINUE SIGNING AUTOGRAPHS.

18 SUE/whisper: ...SO...what IS this about...?

PAGE NINETEEN

SEPARATE NARROW PANEL ACROSS TOP: SATURDAY

PANEL ONE: CLOSE ON A COMIC BOOK COVER COMP SKETCH--IN ROUGH COLOR--FOR THE NEW LICENSED FANTASTIC FOUR COMIC. IT HAS THE MOST INAPPROPRIATELY SUPER-HEROISH LOGO IMAGINABLE. THE FF--CHARGING TOWARDS US WHILE SPORTING ALL-NEW, OVER-THE-TOP, CHANGE-FOR-THE-SAKE-OF-CHANGE COSTUMES--LOOK LIKEWISE ABSURDLY AND VIOLENTLY SUPERHEROIC.

1 FROM OFF: You're KIDDING.

PANEL TWO: PULL BACK TO SHOW WE'RE IN THE BAXTER BUILDING LIVING QUARTERS AGAIN--WHERE A WRITER (w/closed laptop) AND AN ARTIST (w/portfolio and inky hands), MUCH YOUNGER THAN YOU AND I REMEMBER EVER BEING, ARE DESPERATELY TRYING TO PITCH THEIR CONCEPT TO SHERTZER.

2 ARTIST: It's just a ROUGH, but if we're gonna
RELAUNCH the COMIC, THAT'S the HOT look.
WIDESCREEN. AUTHORITATIVE.

3 WRITER: To the EXTREME!

4 SHERTZER: Thank you, Poochie, but NO. You've got it all
WRONG.

PANEL THREE: SHERTZER GRABS HIS JACKET AND BRIEFCASE, READYING
HIS EXIT.

5 SHERTZER: It took me a week to figure it OUT--during which,
I'm happy to report, I've worked out some new
ways to maintain the FF's public profile--but
here's the 411:

6 SHERTZER: These guys AREN'T SUPER-HEROES.

7 WRITER and ARTIST TOGETHER: What?

((more))

PAGE NINETEEN, continued

PANEL FOUR: PAST SHERTZER AS HE EXAMINES A WALL FULL OF CONGRATULATORY CERTIFICATES AND COMMENDATIONS FROM U.S. PRESIDENTS, FROM NASA, FROM THE UN, FROM THE MAYO CLINIC, ETC.

8 SHERTZER: Not REALLY. They don't fight CRIME. They don't go on PATROL. They don't have a BAT-SIGNAL.

9 SHERTZER: They're ASTRONAUTS. They're ENVOYS. ADVENTURERS. EXPLORERS. Sure, GALACTUS comes to town, they'll STEP UP. Trouble finds THEM, they'll kick its ASS.

10 SHERTZER: But that's not the JOB. It just comes WITH. Ask any FRONTIERSMAN.

11 SHERTZER: They're not the AVENGERS. They don't HAVE to be. They were FIRST, so they get to make the RULES...and the first rule IS, they're TRAILBLAZERS.

PANEL FIVE: ON A FRAMED PHOTO OF REED AND SUE CRADLING AND PROUDLY SHOWING OFF THEIR NEW BABY DAUGHTER.

12 SHERTZER: Maybe they've been AROUND a while, but the only thing OLD about the FF...

13 SHERTZER: ...is that they never stop taking us into the NEW.

PAGE TWENTY

PANEL ONE: SHERTZER, THE WRITER AND THE ARTIST ENTER AN ELEVATOR.

1 SHERZTER: My advice? You want to do a COMIC, you make it about PEOPLE, not about COSTUMES, and people will CARE.

2 WRITER: Y'know, they DO wear COSTUMES.

3 SHERTZER: I think that's for the CAMERAS more than anything. I will say THIS, though:

PANEL TWO: AS THE ELEVATOR DOORS CLOSE, WE SEE THAT REED'S WATCHING FROM THE SHADOWS. HE'S HOLDING VAL.

4 SHERTZER: I don't think I'll EVER understand why celebrity's a priority at ALL with Richards.

5 SHERTZER: Why does a man like REED care about the SPOTLIGHT?

PANEL THREE: REED, HAPPY, SMILING BROADLY AT VAL, TAKES HER INTO HIS OFFICE. FAR AS I KNOW, WE'VE NEVER SEEN THIS ROOM BEFORE, BUT AS WE MOVE AROUND, I'D THINK IT'D BE NICE TO HAVE REED'S DIPLOMAS AND Ph.D'S ON ONE WALL, FAMILY PORTRAITS HERE AND THERE--INCLUDING A PHOTO OF THE FOUR IN THEIR SPACESUITS, POSING EAGERLY FOR THE CAMERA JUST BEFORE GETTING INTO THAT FATEFUL ROCKETSHIP. MAYBE LOTS OF HALF-FINISHED PROJECTS ALL ABOUT THE PLACE. ALSO A DESK, 'CAUSE WE'LL NEED TO SEE SOMETHING IMPORTANT ON IT, COMING UP. WE CAN TALK MORE ABOUT THE LOOK OF THIS PLACE ON THE PHONE IF YOU LIKE.

6 REED: Because...well, I wish I could TELL him...

7 REED: Do YOU want to know, Val? It will have to be OUR SECRET. Okay? Okay.

8 REED: Once upon a time, there was a GENIUS who--

9 REED: --a very bright MAN who--

((more))

PAGE TWENTY, continued

PANEL FOUR: REED'S POV--THE PICTURE OF THE FOUR JUST BEFORE THEY GET ABOARD THE SHIP. NO DIALOGUE.

PANEL FIVE: ANGLE PAST THE PICTURE TO REED, SUDDENLY VERY SOMBER.

10 REED: Once upon a time, there was a very ARROGANT man who did something very STUPID.

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

PANEL ONE: REED TALKS SINCERELY TO VAL, LEANS AGAINST HIS DESK.

1 REED: Without proper preparation or shielding, he took his FRIENDS through a wave of RADIATION that made them ALL something OTHER THAN HUMAN.

2 REED: His guilt was UNBEARABLE...and DESERVED. These were the people he LOVED, and he'd DESTROYED THEIR LIVES. Thanks to HIM, they were fated to be FREAKS...LAB SPECIMENS or WORSE...

PANEL TWO: ON REED'S DESK, WE CAN SEE ATOP OTHER PAPERS A LETTER WITH A "CAUSE CEREBRAL" LETTERHEAD.

3 REED: ...unless he CHANGED that fate somehow.

4 LETTER: Dear Dr. Richards:
Our best wishes regarding your absence from this year's conference. We certainly understand your desire to instead spend time with your new daughter and congratulate you
[remainder of letter cropped by art or panel border]

PANEL THREE: VAL LAUGHS AS REED MAKES A FUNNY FACE. (AND WHEN REED RICHARDS MAKES A FUNNY FACE...)

5 REED: Unless he made the world see them for what they WERE: three of the best and bravest people anyone could HOPE to meet.

6 REED: So he refused to let them operate in SECRET. He gave them a home in a city of EIGHT MILLION. And he gave them COSTUMES. And a FLYING CAR. And encouraged them to parade around with some pretty outlandish NAMES.

((more))

PAGE TWENTY-ONE, continued

PANEL FOUR: REED ENTERS VAL'S NURSERY.

7 REED: "Mr. Fantastic." Does that sound like something anyone would REALLY want to call themselves? No. But that the kind of thing that made HEADLINES. And T-SHIRTS. And ACTION FIGURES.

8 REED: He knew that would keep people from FEARING them. You see, GLAMOUR and FAME weren't OPTIONS. They were NECESSITIES.

PANEL FIVE: REED GENTLY TUCKS VAL INTO HER CRIB.

9 REED: Because maybe by turning his friends into CELEBRITIES...

10 REED: ...he could be FORGIVEN for taking their normal lives AWAY.

PANEL SIX: PAST VAL TO REED, LOOKING DOWN AT HER WITH A MELANCHOLY EXPRESSION. NO DIALOGUE.

PANEL SEVEN: STAT.

11 REED: Someday.

PAGE TWENTY-TWO

PANEL ONE: REED TURNS AS BEN AND JOHNNY, A LITTLE ALARMED, SUDDENLY STICK THEIR HEADS THROUGH THE DOOR. (WE SHOULD SEE THE DOOR SWINGING OPEN TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THEY ARRIVED *AFTER* REED FINISHED HIS MONOLOGUE.) THEY'RE BOTH WEARING INDIAN HEADDRESSES AND BUCKSKINS OVER THEIR UNIFORMS.

1 BEN: --said I'll tell him! Hey, Stretcho, y'know how you told us not ta mess with the TIME MACHINE? Well, MATCHSTICK here--

2 JOHNNY: It was YOUR idea!

3 BEN: Whatever. Lissen, DAVY CROCKETT needs some HELP!

4 JOHNNY: Sure, NOW...!

PANEL TWO: SECONDS LATER, REED (ON THE RUN) GRABS SUE BY THE HAND AND THEY SMILE AT ONE ANOTHER.

5 SUE: =sigh= AND M.I.T. called, so AFTER we unwild the WEST...

6 SUE: Boy, I hear SOME people get days OFF here and there. US, on the other hand...there's always going to be SOMETHING, isn't there?

7 REED: Oh, please. You know the answer to that as well as I do:

PANEL THREE, BIG: MORE SYMBOLIC THAN ACTUAL, SO BACK TO NORMAL UNIFORMS FOR THE BOYS AS WE RIFF DIRECTLY OFF THE RIGHT STUFF POSTER--THE BRIGHTLY BACKLIT FANTASTIC FOUR AS THEY HEAD TOWARDS THEIR NEXT BIG ADVENTURE. LET'S GO WITH THEM STRIDING PROUDLY TOWARDS US RATHER THAN THE STOCK "LUNGING AT YA" POSE--IF YOU CAN CAPTURE IT, I LIKE THE SENSE OF CONFIDENCE AND DIGNIFIED STRENGTH THIS IMPARTS. REED'S GRINNING FROM EAR TO EAR.

8 REED: I certainly HOPE so.